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ABSTRACT

In light of increasing concern over media portrayals of women as willing victims of violence, a study examined images of violence against women in advertising, with the goal of determining to what extent advertisers were aware of the implied violence against women in the ads they sponsor, and, if advertisers were aware of the underlying implications, what their motives were in running the ads. Indepth telephone interviews were conducted with spokespersons for 13 companies responsible for an advertisement portraying violence against women during the past decade. Respondents were asked questions concerning target audience, type of response expected, presence of implied violence against women in their advertisements, impact of the advertisement on sales, and use of market research. The discussion focuses on 12 print ads and one television commercial appearing between 1975-1985. Results showed that over twice as many of the ads targeted women as men. As to impact on sales and use of market research, all representatives said that the effect of one ad could not be measured, and vehemently denied that the choice of advertisement depicting violence toward women was supported by market research. In addition, eight of the representatives were aware of the suggested violence against women in their advertisements, but justified it as being humorous or artistic. Most of the ads had resulted in public outcries. The fact that many women tolerate being abused in the media could indicate that women have been socialized to view themselves as victims. (Thirty-nine footnotes are appended.) (ARH)

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MYTHS AND MIRRORS:

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF IMAGES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MAINSTREAM ADVERTISING

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MYTHS AND MIRRORS:

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF IMAGES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

IN MAINSTREAM ADVERTISING

During the past decade there has been increasing concern over images of violence against women in all the media, from television to pornography. George Gerbner and Kathleen Connolly have shown that television portrays women as the most frequent victims of violence. Within this general category of women, old women are most often shown as victims on television, followed by non-white women, working class women and unmarried women, in that order (12). An example of such television violence occurred on the soap opera General Hospital, when in the fall of 1980 "Luke" raped "Laura," but a year or so later it seems that Laura had fallen in love with Luke and married him (13). Although the idea that a woman could fall in love with and marry a man who raped her is not only improbable but is in itself obscene, the myth that women enjoy physical abuse is often reinforced in the mass media, particularly in the mass medium of pornography (3).

However, an analysis of images of violence against women in all media is beyond the scope of the present study; rather, this study will focus solely on a qualitative analysis of such images in advertising.

Following a review of literature dealing with possible incidental learning from advertising, the present study attempts to answer two research questions:

1) To what extent are advertisers aware of the implied violence against women in some of the ads they sponsor?
2) If advertisers are indeed aware of the underlying violence suggested, what are their motives in running the ads?

To answer these questions, the researcher conducted in-depth telephone interviews with spokespersons for 13 companies which have sponsored an ad portraying violence against women during the past decade.

Review of Literature

Before considering specific examples of violent images in certain ads, let us consider whether incidental learning does in fact result from advertising. Incidental learning has been defined as "unplanned, unintentional learning (7, p. 301). Applied to advertising, it would mean that advertising may reinforce stereotypes and role behavior, for example, in addition to merely informing us that a certain product is available.

A number of laboratory studies have shown that attitudes toward sex-roles may be influenced by television commercials. Shirley O'Bryant and Charles Corder-Bolz showed 67 five to ten year-old children commercials which portrayed women in both traditional roles (fashion model, file clerk, manicurist), and non-traditional roles (welder, butcher, laborer). The children were pre-tested for occupational knowledge, propensity to stereotype the occupations, and for their own occupational preference. Changes from pre- to post-exposure showed that

> ...after viewing women in traditionally male jobs, more girls give higher preference ratings to these jobs on the post-test than they had on the pre-test....if TV and other media would make a conscientious effort to avoid stereotyping, and instead, to portray diverse and challenging roles for boys and girls, it would have an important impact on the development of occupational aspirations.
>
> (24, p. 243)

A similar study by Charles Atkin (1) used commercials which showed women in the roles of court judge, computer programmer and television technician. Children who saw these non-traditional commercials were more likely to select those occupations as appropriate for women. The results were particularly dramatic in the case of the woman seen as a judge. Over half the children who had seen that commercial checked "judge" as suitable for a woman; only 27% of the control group did so (1).

Thus far we have considered only whether children may learn from stereotyped sex-roles in television commercials, but are adults likewise affected by such incidental learning? Joyce Jennings-

Walstedt et al have shown that college women who saw commercials with women in traditional roles expressed fewer career aspirations than those who saw women in non-traditional roles (15). In this study, the researchers devised eight commercials: four showed women in traditional, dependent and subservient roles; the other four reversed the roles within exactly the same script, showing women as dominant and men as subservient. Results of the study showed that women who saw the role-revers ed set of commercials tested as more independent and more self-confident. The researchers concluded that implicit messages in commercials, learned unconsciously, have the power to affect both the attitudes and behavior of adult women (15).

Trevor Millum would agree with Jennings-Walstedt et al that advertising has the power to affect women's attitudes about themselves:

> ...But unless the media are completely divorced from life, in which case it is difficult to see how they could function, values and assumptions and standards (often vaguely held and ill-defined) must be affected to some degree. It is therefore important to ascertain in what direction these pressures operate. (22, p. 180)

Millum cites an article entitled "Occupation Housewife," in which Anne Oakley wrote:

> A majority of women who are housewives apparently fail to realize this [that housework is unproductive, arduous, petty and excludes anything that would promote the development of the woman] or to suffer from it in any direct way. The solution to the paradox lies in the socialization of women into the equation of femininity with domesticity. Through this socialization, which various forms of social control serve to maintain, housework becomes a part of themselves: not only of their lives but of their identities.
>
> (Oakley, 1970, quoted in 22, p. 180)

Millum adds that advertising is "one of the forms of social control and one which stands to gain from the maintenance of this sort of socialization." (22, p. 180)

Millum's argument that advertising functioned as a form of social control which reinforced women's roles as housewives in the mid-seventies can be applied to other trends in the mid-eighties. For example, some advertisers have picked up on a trend toward violence against women in pornography, and have used similar images of violence against women in ads for everyday products. If Millum's logic is extended to this disturbing trend, one might argue that advertisers' images of women as victims function as a form of social control to keep women dependent on men for protection in a world where they cannot be safe by themselves.

The idea that violence against one woman (in this case, even fictional violence against a model in a magazine ad) should serve as a form of social control over all women is forcefully presented in Jalna Hanmer's article "Violence and the Social Control of Women" (14).

With regard to the specific problem of advertising images of violence against women, a search of the literature revealed that next to nothing has been written on this subject in either academic or trade publications. Seymour Feshbach and Neal Malamuth have observed that images of sadomasochism

> have been creeping into advertising, fashion photography, and the popular culture. Photographer Helmut Newton's picture spread in May 1975 Vogue entitled "The Story of Ohhh..." was one of the first and most dramatic examples. Another was the billboard picture of a bound woman, advertising the Rolling Stones' album Black and Blue a few years ago, which was removed from the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles after vigorous protests (11, p. 111).

Jean Kilbourne's film Killing Us Softly: Advertising Images of Women (18) provides some alarming examples of violent images, as do a number of slide collections by women's groups such as Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPAM) and Women Against Pornography (WAP).

Julia London, coordinator of WAVAW in Los Angeles, has written about images of violence against women in record albums (20). London considers various explanations for why such images have proliferated:

> Some see them as an extreme attempt on the part of advertisers, photographers and editors to gain and hold the attention of their audiences. Other see them as a violent reaction on the part of men who are feeling guilty and sexually threatened by the women's newfound awareness and militancy. From this point of view, images of abused women could represent a warning to women by a male dominated society about what could or should happen to them if they dare challenge their subordinate status in society and particularly in the home.
>
> Some maintain that, however degrading, these images apparently sell merchandise. Why the mistreatment of women should stimulate sales even in predominantly women's markets is subject to much debate and speculation. If it is true that such advertisements sell to women, the women's response is not totally inconsistent with that of other oppressed groups in similar situations-- a further proof of how real and pervasive their oppression has been, of how difficult for some of them it is to redefine and see themselves in the light of their newfound dignity.
>
> (20, p. 510)

London charged that even after repeated demands by WAVAW and California NOW of the National Organization for Women to stop using images of violence against women on their album covers, record company executives made no response: the violent images persisted (20, p. 518). Although these executives were fully aware of the implied sado-masochism of many of their album covers, rather than attempting to eradicate such images, they tried instead to discredit the work of groups such as WAVAW and NOW (20, p. 521). In view of the fact that most record purchases are made by young people between the ages of 14 and 25, and that more males than females buy rock records (20, pp. 520-521), one might conclude that record company executives have decided that debasing portrayals of women do indeed sell more albums to young men. These executives are apparently unconcerned with the role such images might have in legitimizing real-life violence against women.

London says that the album cover images of violence teach us

--that women are victims in the same sense that grass is green
--that women like to be abused and beaten
--that women encourage and ask for abuse

> --that women are appropriate, easy targets
> --that victimized or abused women are humorous, sexually stimulating or thrilling
> --that the appropriate and normal way for a man to treat a woman is to abuse and demean her.
>
> These myths trivialize, condone and encourage acts of violence against women. They breed discrimination, dehumanization, and abuse of women and jeopardize their rights and safety (20, p. 520).

Just as London's article, published in Victimology, comprises the only academic treatment of the problem, trade publications have been equally reticent on the subject. Advertising Age has commented on the problem of abusive images of women in Europe and South Africa, for example, but not on such images here in the United States (6). The Advertising Age article describes a British commercial for Wrangler jeans in which a young woman is attacked by a gang of thugs but is finally rescued by a Conan-like hero. A French commercial for Buffalo jeans shows a girl, naked except for the jeans, standing bound by ropes in shallow water.

Yvette Roudy, French Minister of Women's Rights, attempted to ban this commercial; in fact, Mitterand's ministers introduced legislation into the National Assembly that would outlaw any advertising that demeaned women or displayed them as sex objects (6, p. M-40). This produced an immediate and predictable cry of censorship from the French advertising profession, which insists that judges will have a hard time deciding "what amounts to discrimination against women and what doesn't" (25).

Current interpretation and app lication of the First Amendment would preclude legislation outlawing images demeaning to women in the United States, as is evident from the present proliferation of pornographic "depictions of brutality and violence where women are literally beaten into submission and are portrayed as enjoying and even encouraging such treatment" (37).

Seeing that pornography sells, advertisers may have decided to experiment with toned-down variations on one of pornography's most prevalent themes: that women enjoy abuse. Or is it poss ible, on

the other hand, that advertisers are truly oblivious to the graphic violence their ads imply?

To return to the two research questions posed above, dealing with 1) advertisers' awareness of implied violence against women in their ads and 2) advertisers' reasons for using such images, the researcher concluded that one way to find out why advertisers have been sponsoring such ads would be to ask them.

Method

The following discussion will attempt to answer these two questions with regard to twelve print ads and one television commercial appearing between 1975-1985.

Data were gathered through telephone interviews with advertising managers, sales representatives and managers of corporate communications of the companies which sponsored the ads. In a few cases the researcher was able to supplement these responses with telephone interviews with the account executives who created the ads as well.

Limitations

A limitation of the present study is that data are based on self-report; thus, the credibility of the respondents' answers depends on both the accuracy of their memories and their willingness to tell the truth (32). Because the researcher was not present when the ads were created, however, the only accessible information must be based on self-report. Respondents' statements are thus taken at face value in the hope that filtered light is better than none.

Interview Schedule

Respondents were asked the five following questions:

1) Who was your target audience for this ad?
2) What kind of response did this ad elicit from your target audience and the public in general?
3) Would you agree that there is implied violence against the woman portrayed in this ad?

4) Was there a perceptible impact on your sales as a result of the ad?
5) Did you base this ad on market research showing that your target audience was intrigued by images of violence against women, and therefore would read your ad and buy your product?

Results

Responses to the first question revealed that over twice as many of the ads (eight) targeted women as men (three) and only two targeted both sexes, as is evident from the products advertised (see Table I).

Although answers to the second and third questions varied, respondents were unanimous in their responses to the fourth and fifth questions. When asked whether their sales had increased or decreased as a result of the ad in question, all of them said that the ad had not hurt their sales either in the short- or long run. Their answers can be summed up as: "We really can't tell you what effect one individual ad might have had on our sales. There are just too many variables. We would not have been in a position to use market research to determine how one ad does; our general objective is simply to place our name before the public."

Respondents were vehement in their answers to the fifth question, which dealt with whether there might be market research indicating that their target audience might find abusive images of women interesting. To this question, the answer was a resounding "No!" They sometimes added comments such as "That's baloney," or "Photographers do not have access to market research; they go on gut feelings."

Because answers to the fourth and fifth questions did not differ, they are not reported individually below, as are responses to the first three questions.

Individual Responses

With regard to advertisers' respons es to questions about implied violence against women in their ads, the following broad generalizations can be made:

1) Advertisers do not want to offend their target audience because this could potentially hurt their sales.
2) Although advertisers do not want to offend their target audience, the competition among advertisers simply to get people to look at their ads is so intense that some of them try to tread a fine line between shocking or amusing consumers with an outrageous image, and offending them with the image.
3) If advertisers agreed that an ad could be interpreted as insinuating violence against a female model, they generally explained the scene as a) tongue-in-cheek, meant to be taken as a joke, or b) artistic.
4) Queries about public response to a particular ad suggest that the ad discussed here represent a continuum ranging from a light-humored ad which the public apparently liked to attempts at humor or "art" which sparked heated pub lic outcries.

When advertisers were asked to justify the use of abusive images of women for either the sake of art or humor, their responses also fell along a continuum which seemed to reflect the degree of public furor raised by their ad. The continuum ranged from rejecting any form of censorship (for ads which sparked little or no negative feedback) to an embarrassed apology for ads which instigated many angry letters. Various responses along the continuum can be summed up as follows:

1) We don't believe in censorship of any sort.
2) We're not just implying violence; it's overt, but it's just a joke, not to be taken seriously. What's the matter, you have no sense of humor?

3) We may or may not have been implying violence against women. How you interpret it is your problem. We were just being artistic.
4) I didn't personally see anything offensive about the ad, but we discontinued it when it was made clear to us that some consumers were offended by it.
5) We admit that our ad contained an image abusive to women. It was a terrible mistake, and we will never make such a mistake again.

The remainder of this discussion is organized along the continuum ranging from apparent public acceptance to public outrage.

At one end of the continuum is an ad that most people seem to find inoffensive and genuinely funny. It was for Henri-Charles Coisenet tennis wear, made by Descente America. The ad pictures a self-assured woman who has just beaten a man at tennis. The caption reads: "When you've got the advantage on court and off, there's only one name, HCC...." But the woman does not see that just behind her the man is threatening to hit her with his racket, ostensibly from his frustration at losing. When Sandy Pogue, Sales Manager for Descente America, was asked about this ad, he said:

> We wanted to show the animo sity between them; it was our intention to show the man about to hit her. She is strutting like a peacock; she's a liberated woman with a haughty air. We wanted to show, in a playful way, a woman looking attractive and winning.
>
> The man is a typical macho-male. It is true he wants to hit her with the racket; no man can take getting beaten by a woman lightly. If men are honest, they'll admit that they can't stand losing to a woman in any sport.
>
> The ad was targeting women tennis players; we were trying to make men look silly. It was well-received by women; they thought it was funny (29).

In fairness, the researcher must agree with Pogue that the ad has invariably sparked gales of laughter from classes of 450, 300, 80 or 20 students whenever she showed a slide of the ad. When students were asked why they laughed, both men and women said, "Oh, he's not really going to hit her, but he sure wants to." A few men

added, "In real life you would never dream of hitting such a beautiful woman, but you would definitely feel like the guy in the ad if she beat you at tennis."

With this ad, Descente America apparently succeeded in conveying their intended message: most peoples immediate reaction is one of genuine laughter.

Another ad campaign which the public apparently accepts is Philip Morris' Virginia Slims campaign, which has been running since 1968. Although one might argue that the message "You've come a long way, baby," is contradictory or patronizing in that it calls grown women "babies," one might feel that the campaign is otherwise innocuous. In the past few years, however, it seems that the background images of turn-of-the-century characters have increasingly shown women as victims of violence for the apparent purpose of amusing us. A 1982 ad features Montana Myrt, a plump, feisty middle-aged woman who asks "one of the boys" for a drag. In the second frame "one of the boys" has tied her up and is dragging her along the ground behind his horse (28). Another 1982 ad showed an army wife sneaking a cigarette outside a fort. In the second frame, her husband has tied her to a post, with the caption, "After her husband discovered her, she never left the post" (26, p. 160). A 1984 ad shows a young blonde smoking at "The Great Northern Lumber Camp." We next see her tied to a log floating downstream while five men watch with approval. A 1985 ad shows a husband infuriated by his wife's sneaking a cigarette. He takes the immediate action of stringing her up on the backyard clothesline (27). Thus far, however, there seems to be no ind ication that these ads have met with any resistance from the public. Cathy Lieber, Brand Manager of Virginia Slims at Philip Morris, told the researcher, "We have received very few negative letters," and added that "99.99% of our consumer mail is positive" (19).

Philip Morris employs Leo Burnett to produce the Virginia Slims ads. The researcher contacted Michael Coleman, creative director of the Virginia Slims account. After a few general questions, she said: "I have become concerned by some of your recent ads in which

there are background images of violence against women. How do you respond to this criticism?

I don't (4).

Coleman refused to discuss the matter further, insisting that the researcher must speak with Tom Keim, Director of Marketing Communication at Philip Morris. Keim made the following comments:

> All the Virginia Slims ads are completely tongue-in-cheek; they're an attempt to highlight the plight of women at the turn of the century. I don't think anyone would ever think of taking them seriously.
>
> Q: Then you're saying that we shouldn't be disturbed at seeing all these women tied up because it's just a joke?
>
> A: Humor is very subjective. What might be one person's hilarity might be another's disgust. A lot of folks feel very positive about our being a feminist ad campaign. You have to look at the sum total of our ads before you make any judgment (17).

Keim staunchly defended the Virginia Slims campaign, insisting that the background images of bound women were completely tongue-in-cheek. Hanmer has observed that "at its most covert, the threat of force or force itself may proceed from behavior which on the surface may appear friendly or joking" (14, p. 219). She explains that joking is the subtle form of veiled threats which may serve to control women's behavior (14, p. 219). In the Virginia Slims ads, modern-day women are expected to laugh at an earlier, fictional situation where one woman is tied up, often while three to five men gloat over her punishment. Taken individually, one might argue that the ads are harmless enough. But if all print ads were gathered in a giant photo album of "the American family," an alien anthropologist might conclude that our society is often amused at least by fictional intimidation or abuse of women.

In addition to accepting some degree of "tongue-in-cheek" violence against women, the public appears to accept "artistic" ads in which a woman looks very frightened or intimidated. The ad described here was for Nunn Bush Brass Boot shoes, and portrays a woman running away from two men. Her face is ash-white, as if she

has just been badly frightened. Like Cinderella, she loses one of her shoes as she is running, as we can see from three frames of film beneath the picture. (Each frame shows the shoes of one of the three characters.) The picture was taken by fashion photographer Deborah Turbeville. Commenting on the picture, Lou Melazzo, Director of the Brass Boot Division, said:

> We were running this series of ads using photographs by world-famous photographers like Deborah Turbeville. More people said, "Who did the ad?" but they didn't want the shoes. Well, I guess we got more interest in the shoes when we put the film frames with close-ups of the shoes under Turbeville's photograph. The ad didn't necessarily get people in to buy our merchandise, but it was faily successful as a conceptual ad, to get people familiar with our name.
>
> We had all kinds of people calling in, asking what was going on between the woman and the two men. They're just good friends romping around, having fun on an autumn afternoon.
>
> Q: You don't think the woman looks frightened?
>
> A: Everyone reads what he or she wants into any picture. We only had three letters objecting to the picture; that's not bad out of the whole United States (21).

If Melazzo's comments are true, perhaps most people did indeed consider the photograph "artistic."

Another ad which was apparently accepted as artistic was for a pair of shoes called "Nudes," made by the Bort Carleton Division of the Anwelt Corporation. This ad showed just the legs of two women from just above the knee down. The two women's legs are intertwined and appear to be dangling, giving the impression that the women are hanging. If one fills in the picture mentally, one realizes that they are hanging back-to-back, possibly nude, if one takes the cue from the bold-faced name of the shoe.

When asked about the ad, Fay Nilsen, Communications Director for the Bort Carleton Division, said:

> We were aiming at 17 year-olds with the "Nudes" ad. We didn't want any background in the picture; our purpose was to focus on the shoes so they wouldn't be cluttered with other things. The only purpose we had in making the ad was to display our product fully.

> Q: But why would you show two women hanging back-to-back to sell shoes?
>
> A: I would more think they were dancing rather than hanging. I would have put more emphasis on it if they were facing each other--that might imply lesbianism. I just don't see what your concern is--we were just being artistic (23).

Another ad which Vogue readers apparently found acceptable featured a woman glaring fiercely with eyes blackened with make-up. Her breasts are bare, but her torso is bound with six belts, and a metal choker in the form of a smake is at her throat. London states that "Women are often associated with sin and snakes and are seen as the cause of evil" (20, p. 516).

Although this ad did not spark a general public outcry, a Vogue sequence called "Together Again" did (2, pp. 139-151). This sequence was a 12-page spread by photographer Richard Avedon and was touted as "a scenario for modern lovers" (2, p. 139). It showed a man alternately caressing or menacing a woman modeling clothes. At the dramatic peak of the sequence, the man smashes the woman across the face. Even worse, she seems to enjoy it: on the next page she is touching him affectionately (2, p. 150). As is stated above, the myth that women enjoy physical abuse is prevalent in pornography (11, p. 114), but when this myth appears in a women's fashion magazine, it is both reinforced and legitimized.

When asked about both the belt-bound woman and the one whose boyfriend brutally hit her, Norman Waterman, Advertising Manager for Vogue, explained that he did not believe in censoring the content of the ads:

> In the case of an advertisement that is made by an outside company, we do not put ourselves in the position of censor. The only thing we would censor would be an ad for a product inappropriate for Vogue readers: we would not accept an ad for guns, for example. We wouldn't run an ad for those pills people are swallowing in California to make their skin turn tan.
>
> Q: But you would run an ad sequence which shows a man alternately hitting or being affectionate with a woman?

A: Sure--sounds like my marriage.

Q: And you're not bothered by the implied bondage in the ad for belts?

A: Whether it bothers me personally or not is irrelevant. Would you want us to become censors? The greatest censors in the world are our readers. If they don't like an ad, the product won't sell. Don't ask me to be the censor (36).

It is difficult to argue with Waterman's assertion that readers are the greatest censors. The "Together Again!" sequence apparently crossed the line of acceptability in many women's minds (20, p. 518).

But if an abusive ad receives extensive attention from news media as an example of an abusive ad, its sponsors may not be unhappy about it because even negative publicity may be better than none. Such was the case with an ad for Garolini shoes, sold by Smyth Brothers in Chicago. In this ad, a woman is lying unconscious on a bathroom floor. She is still clutching a goblet from which her drink has spilled, but she has dropped a hand-mirror, which is reflecting a man with a menacing look standing over her. The picture was taken by Michael Vollan, a free-lance photographer in Chicago, who made the following comments about it:

> When I did that ad, I was hired by Harry Weber, who headed an ad agency called The Rainbow Group at that time. Yeah, some people were upset by that--they call us [creative people] a bunch of sick people--well, I think Jean Kilbourne is sick.
>
> Fashion has always had the freedom to express all kinds of emotions. The woman in the picture is laid out very elegantly. I wanted to have more drama in the picture--to have the wine glass shattered, but they [the ad agency] wouldn't let me. People in ad agencies are all scared; they're all covering their backsides. They should fire the art directors and let us take pictures. I design my pictures through gut feelings.
>
> Maybe the woman is about to be seduced--I never looked upon it as rape. If the expression on the man's face looks malicious, the malice is in your mind. The picture was done to shake the mind, to rattle you.
>
> Sex has always been used in advertising, whether male or female. When it's subtle, it's much more interesting.
>
> If women say they feel threatened by this picture, they're probably sexually frustrated.

> There's so much crap that goes on in the world--people should get upset about real violence--to get upset about ads is ridiculous.
>
> This ad was targeted to a very sophisticated clientele. My motives in doing the photograph were to copy Helmut Newton. The ad was very popular among advertisers; I got a lot of good accounts when people found out I had done the photography (35).

The researcher also discussed the woman-on-bathroom-floor ad with Beth Skillicorn, a designer and illustrator for Skillicorn Associates, the ad agency employed by Smyth Brothers just after the ad began its run. She said:

> That ad got a lot of bad publicity. After I obtained the account, I tried to turn things around. The ad got so much bad publicity--it was even on network television--but Smyth Brothers didn't get upset. Any publicity is good, whether it's good or bad doesn't matter so much.
>
> The ad shouldn't have run. There is more violence against women in women's magazines; fashion editorials are the worst. The fashion photographers are all trying to be like Helmut Newton. Some of Newton's photographs are very disturbing, but now he's becoming very accepted. Now he's a hot item.
>
> Advertising is anti-family and anti-women. Men are threatened by liberated women. They're less threatened by child-women, which is why you see so many 16 year-old girls selling everything. Most fashion photographers are male....
>
> Now more and more women are offended by these ads and are taking measures to avoid certain things....
>
> I quit the Smyth Brothers account--am not working for them any longer.... (34)

Like Smyth Brothers' ad for Garolini shoes, a series of shoe ads which provoked an incensed public reaction was sponsored by Famolare, Incorporated. In one of the ads, a woman appears to be running away from a man operating a jackhammer. She seems to be bare from the waist down, but is wearing Famolare shoes. We see only her hips and legs, but one cannot help wondering why she is not wearing clothes on a city street. In a similar ad, we again see only the woman's legs, but this time she might be clad in a skimpy swimsuit. One foot is on a starting block for a race, and we see a man's hand about to fire a gun behind her (10).

Biana Famolare, Director of Retail, said that the ads had not offended her personally, although she quickly added that her company had completely changed its campaign:

> Personally, I thought the model in those ads had nice legs, and the ads didn't offend me at all. My father, Joe Famolare, certainly did not intend to offend anyone with the ads, but Women Against Pornography in New York and NOW were very upset about the ads. They said the model was being cut in half, and the jackhammer and the gun were phallic symbols that suggested violence--what wild things they brought into it! I didn't see any of that myself.
>
> My sister and I were in college at the time, and all our peers were giving us a hard time about those ads. My sister was at Smith, and she was really getting razzed.
>
> So we said, "Daddy, please don't run those ads anymore."
>
> When he saw how much furor the ads were creating, he said, "Forget it," and stopped the ads. He was one of the first to change his entire ad campaign.
>
> In fact, Women Against Pornography and other women's groups were so happy with him, they gave him the Miss Liberty Award. He was the first man to get it. All the women started loving him, because we changed our campaign to "Footloose and Famolare" with his face in the ad.
>
> We're using a different ad agency now, too (9).

Like the Famolare and Smyth Brothers ads which were claimed to be "artistic," the Encore Shoe Corporation sponsored an ad for its line of Zodiac shoes which was also intended to be artistic, but which resulted in an immediate public outcry. The ad pictures a young Asian woman lying on the floor for a photo-session. A man is holding a light meter at her cheek, an Asian man is straddling the woman, and a third man at her feet is pointing a camera at her (39). Women Against Pornography singled out this ad as an example of the "woman-hating, sexually violent mainstream ads women are constantly bombarded with" (38, p. 14).

When asked about the ad, Jody Katz, Assistant Vice President of Advertising, said:

> We came out with a new line of Zodiac shoes for men in 1981. Most men had never heard of Zodiac. The line was only known for women's boots.
>
> It's really hard to sell shoes. You compete against so many other ads out there. If you just do a close-up of the shoe, no one will look at it. People are interested in ads with people, in a lifestyle statement.

> Our objective is to place our name before the public. We're aiming at the urban, upscale yuppie who wants daring fashion footwear.
>
> Q: What kind of response did the ad get?
>
> A: Gentleman's Quarterly sent us a list of several hundred people who wrote objecting to the ad. We meant for it to be provocative, but we never intended for it to suggest violence toward women. The reason it came out as it did was that originally, we had planned for the woman to be the photographer taking pictures of the men's shoes--sort of a shoot within a shoot--but it didn't showcase the shoes well enough. In order to focus attention on the men's shoes, we ended up having her lie on the floor to draw people's eyes to the men's shoes.
>
> I was there while we were shooting it, and it just never occurred to me that it looked like the men were threatening the woman. I wouldn't have allowed it if I had realized what it really looked like. As a woman, I just wouldn't have allowed it. When we started getting letters of complaint, I felt terrible about it, and I took the time to respond to every single letter individually (16).

The ads for Zodiac, Famolare and Garolini shoes and Avedon's photographs advertising clothes were, according to company spokespersons, intended to be artistic, but all of them crossed the line beyond what many members of the public would accept. Unlike these four "artistic" ads, the four ads discussed below were intended to be humorous, but again offended a significant portion of the consumers who saw them.

Two ads which attempted humor were interpreted by many readers to be making light of battered wives. One ad for a liqueur called Jägermeister showed a woman with puffy red eyes and one arm in a cast and sling. In her other hand she holds a cordial of the liqueur, saying, "I'm drinking Jägermeister because you ought to see him!" The picture with the copy implies that she is perhaps a battered wife.

Jägermeister is marketed in the United States by the Sidney Frank Importing Company, Incorporated. Its sales representative Robert Rosello made the following comments about the ad described above:

That ad was one of a series of 175 slogans which began with "I'm drinking Jägermeister because...." Some of them were award-winning ads; for example, we had one where a man with a huge bald forehead says, "I'm drinking Jägermeister because I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal lobotomy." We just meant to be funny.

Q: What was your target audience for the ads?

A: Well, the ads were geared toward men.

Q: Do you think men would have been amused by the battered wife ad?

A: Oh no, that "abusive ad" was a mistake. I can't think of any reason why my superiors thought it was funny. I feel embarrassed to even talk about it. It's obvious that has generated a lot of bad will against us. It was not real sound thinking to run that ad. I guess the subject of wife abuse was not at a peak then as it is now, and we just weren't thinking....We've hired a new ad agency now, in any case (30).

Like the Jägermeister ad, an ad for "The Club" strawberry daquiri sponsored by the Heublein/Spirits Group seemed to verbally (though not visually) suggest violence. An overweight middle-aged woman says, "Hit me with a Club." If wife-beating is implied here, it is on a far more subtle level than the Jägermeister ad, but Ms. Magazine publisher Pat Carbine and over 1000 other women objected to the ad, citing the copy as an invitation to physical abuse. J. E. Corr, Vice President of Marketing for Heublein, responded to Carbine's objections by saying that he was "stunned" by the negative reaction to the ad because it had never occurred to him that the ad encouraged or condoned physical abuse. He did say that Heublein would cancel the ad, however (5). (See Appendix A).

Another ad which was immediately withdrawn following a storm of protest was a local ad for a store called Swept Away in Santa Barbara, California. In December 1982 the Santa Barbara News-Press ran a picture of a woman tied up in a car-wash. The copy read: "All tied up? Christmas shopping got you in a bind? You'll find the most unusual gifts...at Swept Away...."

The public was so enraged by the ad that it was not run in the second edition of the newspaper. When asked about the ad, Alan Shapiro, proprietor of Swept Away, said:

> I had hoped it would be funny. It was supposed to be a play on words--you know--all tied up for Christmas? I'm very different--I'm a maverick, and I like to run off-beat ads.
>
> Sex is sex; sex is always a big selling point. I wish you wouldn't ask me about that ad; I feel like we're beating a dead horse. I wish I had had a man tied up in the car-wash and not a woman.
>
> We were ignorant. We made a mistake. It came out being something that upset everyone, which was not our intention. I'm not employing the man who designed that ad anymore. I didn't like what he did.... (33)

Just as Alan Shapiro thought the public would find a tied-up woman amusing, the Stroh Brewery Company made the mistake of assuming that people would laugh at seeing a woman thrown off a stagecoach. In the scenario for this television commercial, a middle-aged woman and two men are in a stagecoach in the Old West. Bad guys are chasing them, so to lighten their load, the men realize they must throw all their cases of beer off the coach. But they think twice, remembering that it is Stroh's beer, and decide to lighten their load by forcing the woman out of the coach instead.

The Stroh Brewery Company was barraged with letters objecting to the commercial. R. Sue Denny, Manager of Corporate Communications for Stroh's, responded with an official reply in which she explained that the stagecoach commercial "was a spoof of the Old West, and of exaggerated values which we believe no longer hold a place in contemporary society. We certainly did not mean for the ad to be taken seriously, and we sincerely apologize to you if the ad offended you in any way" (8). (See Appendix B).

When asked about the commercial in a telephone interview, R. Sue Denny made the following comments:

> The commercial was pretested in focus groups of both men and women before we aired it, and they seemed to like it. We generally don't get any criticism of our ads, but in this case, when it was broadcast, we had many complaints from women, and men complained about it, too.

Q: What audience were you targeting with that commercial?

A: Well, 88% of all beer is sold to men. The female audience that drinks beer is so small, it couldn't even support one brand. If you did a beer commercial targeting the female audience, the men would cross that beer off--they wouldn't touch it.

Q: Do you think that the male beer drinkers you were targeting liked seeing the woman forced off the stagecoach?

A: I'd prefer to say that she was kindly helped from the stagecoach....Well, yes, I think the commercial may have appealed to a certain male mentality. Maybe some men are unhappy in their relationships with women, and they think, "Why should I have problems with people? I have power. I have the ability to get this person out of my life," which is exactly what the two men did--they got the woman out of the stagecoach (8).

The stagecoach commercial was produced by the Marschalk ad agency. The researcher also spoke with Al Samuels, the assistant account executive for the Stroh's account. He admitted that there had been "a lot of flak" over this commercial, and joked about making a second commercial with the same plot but reversing the sexes: "We were thinking of putting two women on a stagecoach drinking Stroh's Light, and throwing the man out when the bad guys attacked" (31).

Discussion

Of the 13 ads discussed above, only four spokespersons (for Stroh's, Swept Away, Jägermeister and Zodiac) went so far as to admit that the ad their company had published was in poor taste and was a mistake from the very beginning.

Two other spokespersons (for Fam olare and Heublein) said that they didn't see what all the fuss was about, but did discontinue the ad campaign in question. The three spokespersons who said their ads were artistic (for Garolini, Brass Boot and Nudes shoes) made no apologies for their ads at all. The same was true for spokespersons for Vogue, Virginia Slims and Descente America, with the latter two claiming that the implied violence was tongue-in-cheek.

Judging from the comments, eight of the thirteen spokespersons were entirely aware that violence was insinuated against the woman

in the ads, and justified it as artistic or humorous, whereas five spokespersons reported being completely unaware that violence was implied until letters from the public raised the issue (see Table I).

According to the spokespersons interviewed, eight of the thirteen ads resulted in immediate public outcries. Only five were apparently not met by a strong negative response from the public; these were 1) the ad for Brass Boot shoes featuring the photograph by Deborah Turbeville, for which the company received only three negative letters, 2) Bort Carleton's ad for shoes called Nudes, 3) Descente America's HCC tennis clothes, 4) Virginia Slims and 5) the "At the Waist" ad for belts in Vogue.

There was a vehement public outcry, however, against the "Together Again!" sequence in Vogue, which implies that the woman quickly forgets or possibly did not mind her boyfriend slapping her face so hard. This is the only ad of the 13 here that falls back on pornography's myth that women like being abused. Although the other 12 ads do portray women as victims of violence, the women's facial expressions, when visible, do not suggest that they like being victims.

In three of the shoe ads, however, we never see the women's faces. Are two women indeed dancing in the Nudes ad, as Fay Nilsen insisted (23), or are they hanging? Has the woman on the bathroom floor in the Garolini ad fainted, or is she drunk but conscious of the man standing over her? Has the woman in the Famolare ad been frightened by the man with the jackhammer, or assaulted by someone who kept her skirt, leaving her to run bare through the city streets? If violence is implied against women's bodies without showing their faces, can viewers become desensitized or habituated to thinking of women as faceless victims? When women are thus reduced to their body parts or "objectified" (18), can viewers see what is happening without feeling as concerned because the victim is faceless?

Two of the ads selected targeted both men and women (Heublein's Club strawberry daquiris and Nunn Bush Brass Boot shoes), but only

three of the ads targeted men (Stroh's beer, Jägermeister liqueur and Zodiac shoes), whereas the other eight targeted women (see Table I). Because the present study is qualitative, the researcher has not attempted to determine whether images of violence against women occur more frequently in men's or women's magazines. But the fact that such abusive images do occur in Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Better Homes and Gardens and Seventeen is both disturbing and perplexing. Why would advertisers use images of violence against women to sell products to them? If one can accept as true the spokespersons' reports that their sales did not suffer in the short or long run as a result of the ad, we must conclude that although some people were perturbed enough to write a letter, there were no mass boycotts by the public in general or women in particular.

Should this lead us to concluded that women have been socialized to accept images of themselves as victims, even to the point of buying products whose ads reinforce this idea? If so, then London's speculation that women perceive themselves in a way similar to other oppressed groups would be supported (20, p. 510).

Of the ad campaigns discussed here, all have run their course or were discontinued with the exception of the Virginia Slims campaign. Of course, the Philip Morris Company argues that the background images of violence against women are tongue-in-cheek; after all, they are satirizing the way women were treated 85 years ago, and congratulating a woman called "Baby" for having "come a long way." We are expected to laugh at th e wife whose husband ties her to a post in 1896, or the hefty middle-aged woman who is bound and dragged behind a horse in 1901. The fact remains, however, that the Virginia Slims campaign is presenting abuse of women as a source of amusement. Because the abuse is fictional and is set in 1902, the men and women of the 1980s are supposed to find these images funny. The fact that an advertiser can successfully portray men abusing women from any historical period as a joke, suggests that as a society, we are desensitized to such images, and do indeed accept them as a source of amusement.

London states that there is no question that

> romanticized, sensationalized and glorified media violence against women perpetuates those myths and stereotypes surrounding women's victimization that facilitate and legitimize the commission of crimes. (20, p. 520)

When mainstream media such as soap operas, R-rated films, television commercials and magazine ads portray women as pouting but glamorous victims of violence, they do indeed legitimize real-life violence against women.

Advertising is a window on society. If women tolerate these images of violence, or worse, if they acquiesce in buying the products using these images, advertisers will be encouraged to repeat the theme. Advertisers do indeed try to shock us in order to get our attention, but they do not want to offend because this could hurt their sales.

If there is a ray of hope to be found, it is that at least eight of the ads sparked an indignant response from the public, suggesting that not everyone will accept the use of casual sexual violence to sell products. If the public can become sensitized rather than desensitized to this problem, and convey their intolerance of abusive images to the advertisers, this would doubtless have the greatest influence in arresting this trend. When consumers speak loudly enough, advertisers still listen.

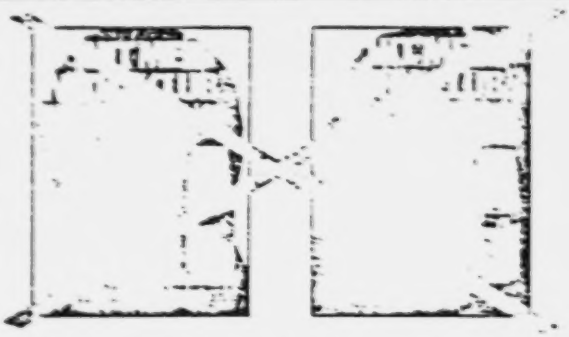
Table I

Ads Accepted as Humorous by Public	Product	Target Audience	Spokesperson said s/he was aware of violence
HCC (Descente America)	tennis clothes	women	yes
Virginia Slims	cigarettes	women	yes
Ads Accepted as Artistic by Public			
At the Waist (Vogue)	belts	women	yes
Brass Boot	shoes	both	no
Nudes	shoes	women	no
Ads Public Did Not Accept as Artistic			
Together Again	clothes	women	yes
Garolini	shoes	women	yes
Famolare	shoes	women	no
Zodiac	shoes	men	no
Ads Public Did Not Accept as Humorous			
Jägermeister	liqueur	men	yes
Heublein (The Club)	liquor	both	no
Swept Away	clothes	women	yes
Stroh's	beer	men	yes

BACKPAGE

A Toast to the Readers of "Ms."

From an advertiser moved by your conviction



Heublein canceled its ad campaign when more than 1,000 letters cited the headline as an invitation to physical abuse. J.E. Corr's splendid letter to *Ms.* describes their response to a serious well-founded protest.

Heublein | Spirits Group
330 New Park Ave | Hartford Connecticut

August 8, 1980

Ms. Pat Carbine
Publisher
"Ms." Magazine
370 Lexington Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Pat,

J. E. Corr, Jr.
Vice President
Marketing

We have decided to cancel the current advertising campaign for our Club Cocktails. As you know, the "Hit Me With A Club" headline drew an immediate and negative response from your readers, a response echoed by others who saw the advertising in other media as well.

As I told you at the outset, we were stunned by the reaction to the theme because it had not occurred to any of us that the message could have been interpreted, even in the remotest sense, as encouraging or condoning physical abuse. Even as we read the first few letters, we simply could not comprehend or accept the connection.

But as we received additional letters, we were moved by the logic and depth of feeling expressed by your readers. They were courteous, thoughtful and profound. Their arguments were persuasive and difficult to refute and ultimately convinced us that the advertising should be changed.

We have taken immediate steps to cancel the remaining ads in the series. Because of publication schedules, however, some magazine ads will continue to appear until early Fall. But none will appear after that. Our outdoor advertising also is carrying the theme but we have directed that the headline be repainted immediately.

You should be heartened by the conviction and ardor of your readership. We thank you, too, for your sound counsel and patient assistance. Indeed, you, your staff and the "Ms." readership were instrumental in our reaching the decision, which was not an easy one. However, we have come to understand and are now in full agreement with your position on this important issue. And I think you will agree that the actions we are now taking underscore that view.

Sincerely,

J. E. Corr, Jr.

APPENDIX B

STROH

THE STROH BREWERY COMPANY
100 RIVER PLACE
DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48207
(313) 446-2000

Thank you for your letter of regarding our Stroh's "Stagecoach" ad.

That ad has been removed from our advertising schedule and will no longer be in use.

The "Stagecoach" commercial was developed as part of a humorous advertising campaign which has been in use by the Stroh's brand for several years. Each of the commercials in that campaign presents an exaggerated situation which is intended to be a spoof of real life.

"Stagecoach" was a spoof of the Old West, and of exaggerated values which we believe no longer hold a place in contemporary society. We certainly did not mean for the commercial to be taken seriously, and we sincerely apologize to you if the ad offended you in any way.

We hope that you'll find our current advertising to be acceptable to your standards.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us. Your letter will be reviewed by our Marketing department and advertising agency.

Sincerely,

R. Sue Denny
Manager, Corporate Communications

mmg

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